

Women's and girls' human security in the context of poverty and inequality

The submitting organizations [Bureau des Avocats Internationaux \(BAI\)](#); [Disaster Law Project](#); [Haitian Women's Collective \(HWC\)](#); [Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti \(IJDH\)](#); and [Nègès Mawon](#) work on advancing human rights in Haiti, including the equal rights of women and girls. We base our [inputs](#) on Haiti-specific reports we deem credible based on our expertise, supplemented by observations made in the course of our work in Haiti and information shared by trusted and experienced partners. We reference the individual [questions posed](#) by the WGDAWG by number.

We note at the outset that gendered data – including on poverty – is highly [limited](#) in Haiti. Much of what is available lacks comparable methodology and is not collected systematically or in meaningful samples, adding to the challenges of tracking and assessing the specific experiences of Haitian women and girls, especially those with intersecting identities that drive compounding vulnerabilities. To illustrate: over 67 percent of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to gender equality cannot be credibly measured in Haiti due to a lack of data. For a further 22 percent, data is poor. Haiti ranks among the worst in the world in progress towards meeting SDGs.

Qs1&2

[Foreign capitalist extraction and exploitation](#) and the [complicated legacies](#) of enslavement and colonialism stunted Haiti's development and drove it to become the [poorest](#) and [one of the most unequal](#) countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Haiti is also currently experiencing an acute governance-turned-humanitarian-crisis characterized by [catastrophic levels of violence](#), which is exacerbating its economic and development challenges. According to [2021 World Bank data](#), Haiti now has a per capita GDP of USD \$1,815 – less than a fifth of the regional average. More than [70 percent](#) of the population lives below the poverty line and more than half is chronically [food insecure](#), with 48 percent (4.7 million) currently facing [acute food insecurity](#) – one of the world's highest levels; 4.9 million Haitians require [humanitarian assistance](#). Inflation currently [tops 30 percent](#), with food, fuel, and other basic necessities especially affected.

The top 20 percent of the population [holds](#) more than 64 percent of Haiti's total wealth, while the poorest 20 holds less than 1. Inequality is [exacerbated by](#) overcentralization and [rural marginalization](#); the last household survey (2012) found that 70 percent of rural households were [chronically poor](#), compared with 20 percent for urban.

“Gender is one of the [main risks](#) for living under the poverty line” and Haiti performs the worst in LAC and among the worst in the world in [gender inequality](#), meaning that women are disproportionately impacted by poverty and external stressors (see also Q8). The estimated 2021 gross national income per capita for women was only [73 percent](#) that for men. In general, more Haitians work in [vulnerable employment](#) than the LAC average, with women significantly over-represented. Women are largely also excluded from employment in the formal sector. Estimates for wage disparities – with women earning significantly less than men – range as high as [32 percent](#) and [more than 50](#), differences that [cannot be fully explained](#) by controlling for variables like education, which themselves arise from unequal attainment reflecting gender inequalities.

Q4

Women and girls have been critical agents for advancing human rights in Haiti (Q15), but remain disadvantaged across all areas of public and private life. Women and girls experience high rates of [gender-based violence \(GBV\)](#), some of which is socially normalized and most of which is undertaken

with impunity. They face gendered barriers to [education](#), [political engagement](#), [participating in the formal economy](#), [earning an equal wage](#), and accessing [credit](#) and the [legal system](#), and are otherwise economically and socially [marginalized](#). This increases their [vulnerability](#) to challenges like poverty, leaves them with fewer resources for resilience to crises, and can force dependence on men, which in turn acts as a [further risk factor](#) for GBV and other harms. These dynamics are further exacerbated, enabled, and entrenched by harmful stereotypes and gendered expectations.

Further, poverty in Haiti reflects complex class distinctions between a small elite and a poor majority, which are based on the economic inequality described in Qs1&2, but also a broader, highly correlated, [class division](#) with roots in colonialism, slavery, racism, and associated power structures. The interests of Haiti's poor majority have [historically](#) been marginalized through foreign interference and government capture benefiting foreigners and Haitian elites. As discussed in Q11, when a government supported by the poor majority sought to advance the social and economic well-being of the poor, those gains were [opposed and undercut](#) by foreign – and elite – supported coups.

Poor women and girls, who are at the intersection of both structural inequalities, are thus especially vulnerable to [exploitation and abuse](#); face far greater barriers to equal enjoyment of rights, services, and protections; and are [less resilient](#) to external shocks. Households in extreme poverty also experience shocks more – [three times as many](#) per year. Strained resources in combination with discriminatory gender norms mean that girls are less likely to be [educated](#) as families choose other necessities or the education of boys, and may be [expected to sacrifice food](#) for males in the family. Poor families also [sometimes resort to sending their children](#), usually [girls](#) (with orphans especially at risk), to work as *restaveks* (essentially domestic workers for wealthy families who promise an education in return). Their [reality](#) is usually closer to indentured servitude [constituting a form of child slavery](#), with long hours, inadequate food, and usually no access to education, alongside a high risk of GBV.

Exclusion from education, adequate livelihoods, and services can drive poor women and girls to engage in transactional sex to survive and leaves them more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse by those with power and access to resources, including [humanitarian aid workers](#) and [UN peacekeepers](#) (Q9). Families stressed by poverty exacerbated by the present crisis sometimes treat “mostly girls and women [as] [tools](#),” forcing them to engage in transactional sex or early marriage as a means of bringing in money or badly needed supplies, or securing [protection from gangs](#). Among other harms, these practices increase [exposure](#) to sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancy, which for girls also [decreases](#) access to education, thereby further perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

Poor women are more impacted by their reduced ability to earn an independent income. They tend to have more onerous unpaid domestic responsibilities with less help. [Over 25 percent](#) of Haitians oppose the idea of women working outside the home – the highest rate in LAC. Even if able to seek employment, women face discrimination in hiring and retention, [sexual harassment](#) without recourse, and unequal pay – as little as [half](#) that of men. They are also [more likely](#) to work in [informal sectors](#) with [little labor protection and no insurance](#) against insecurity or [natural disasters](#). Haiti's female market sellers, known as *Madan Sara*, are illustrative in that they perform [critical](#) economic and [food access](#) functions by serving as a conduit from small farmers to urban buyers. But they have no [formal protections, support, or insurance](#) to buffer them against frequent market fires, violence, [natural disasters](#), and other social stressors like the current crisis, which is devastating such small businesswomen and impeding access to food.

The resulting lack of financial independence can trap women in situations of abuse, especially because resources and [judicial recourse](#) for survivors of GBV are [scarce](#). Haiti's justice system is increasingly [dysfunctional](#) and is, in any case, designed to exclude Haiti's poor and marginalized groups. According to BAI observations, it is especially inaccessible to poor women seeking protection or accountability. More generally, poor women and girls, especially those living in rural areas, are

often [essentially foreclosed](#) from accessing critical services like healthcare, education, and the [justice system](#) by associated fees and exorbitant transportation costs.

Beyond the baseline inaccessibility of healthcare, sexual and reproductive care are especially lacking for poor women in Haiti. [Maternal](#) and [infant](#) mortality rates are the [highest](#) in LAC. Abortion remains [illegal](#) in all circumstances and quality contraception and obstetric care are [severely limited](#), especially for women living in [poverty](#) and [rural areas](#) – even as the pressures for transactional sex described above increase the likelihood of unwanted pregnancies.

Poverty also impacts housing, with the urban poor generally living in dense neighborhoods (sometimes called “[popular neighborhoods](#)”) with almost no access to services. The current crisis – which echoes [patterns](#) from the [past](#) – has seen gangs, some of them with political connections and agendas, seize control of such neighborhoods, [perpetrating massacres](#); [cutting off access](#) to critical needs like food, water, healthcare, and fuel; and specifically [using sexual violence](#), mostly against women and girls, as a [means of popular terror](#). Poor women are thus particularly affected. Their housing is also more generally precarious: partners on the ground report that most women are unable to meet their annual rental fees and rely on “group” living with family or friends. This, in combination with (and as a consequence of) reduced financial independence, exposes women to further risks of abuse and exploitation [like forced evictions and predatory rental agreements](#). Poor quality housing also increases the impact of Haiti’s frequent natural disasters (Q8).

Finally, poor women face greater hurdles in advocating for their distinct needs. For examples, because poor women are more likely to lack literacy skills or education, to speak only Haitian Creole, to bear significant household duties, and to have more precarious access to critical necessities like sustenance, shelter, and fuel, they face greater barriers to conveying their needs, engaging in advocacy, undertaking leadership roles, and participating in any related activities. Thus, where the specific challenges of poverty are not taken into account, efforts to empower women can serve to exclude the critical perspectives of the majority of Haiti’s women and girls and to privilege – [generally along class lines](#) – the [distinct preferences](#) of women who are less poor. For example, grassroots women’s organizations and poor women generally [favored](#) President Aristide for his pro-poor policies and opposed the 2004 coup because they feared, presciently, that it would unleash [large-scale sexual violence](#) and that the successor government would have less commitment to advancing [social equity](#). As a consequence, many poor women felt [betrayed](#) by the established women’s organizations generally supporting the overthrow. Further, because grassroots groups usually [lack](#) resources, institutional access, and a myriad other attributes (including language) implicitly privileged by international donors, they are effectively excluded from activities that neglect deliberate outreach, active accommodation, and thoughtful support. Yet, in spite of facing higher barriers, it is often poor women and grassroots organizations that are at the [vanguard](#) of critical services and advocacy in [crises](#).

Q5

Equality for women in Haiti exists on paper, [but not](#) in practice. Haiti’s [Constitution](#) and laws recognize “equality of the sexes,” and Haiti is [party to](#) several related international human rights instruments that require gender equality, non-discrimination, and affirmative efforts to achieve both. Government departments and policies exist to promote women’s equality, collect and analyze sex disaggregated data, and strengthen social advancement and protection, including the [Ministry of Women’s Affairs and Women’s Rights](#) and the [National Plan](#) to Fight Violence Against Women (2017-2027).

However, formal discrimination against women persists in law and practice. Important rights and obligations recognized by Haiti’s Constitution and through its human rights treaty obligations have not been actualized through enacting legislation. And affirmative legal protections that do exist are largely

unenforced. One example is the [2014 anti-human trafficking law](#), whose hard-won protections for vulnerable women and girls like *restaveks* remain [effectively unused](#).

Related government institutions and programs are [weak and grossly underfunded](#), and gender-focused policies are essentially unimplemented. Periodic [successes](#) in implementing policies and programs for advancing gender justice, like specialized police and judicial units for tackling GBV, are rarely [sustained](#), including due to the lack of dedicated funding and serious political commitment, alongside intervening crises that push gender considerations down the hierarchy of priorities.

Q6

Although [all women and girls](#) in Haiti face barriers to accessing their rights and disaggregated data is scarce (insufficient for Q3), we observe that certain intersecting identities and experiences increase the risk of poverty and other harms, with poverty itself an enormous variable (Q4). These include *restaveks*, **orphans**, those **working in factories or the informal sector (like *Madan Sara*)**, those **living in popular neighborhoods or outside traditional family structures of marriage, past incarceration, and sex work**, as well as the following:

- **Rural** | In general, rural areas are disproportionately affected by poverty and rural women have far less access to services, education, and land ownership. Rural female-headed households are [less financially stable](#) than male-headed households. Rural households are also more likely to resort to exploitative treatment like transactional sex, early marriage, hazardous work, and *restavek* arrangements.
- **LGBTQI+** | LGBTQI+ individuals in Haiti are often targeted for violence and face pervasive discrimination on account of their gender identity or sexual orientation. LGBTQI+ women have [reported](#) being subject to “corrective rapes.” Transgender women sex workers are [four times](#) more likely to contract HIV than cisgender women sex workers. LGBTQI+ women also face [added barriers](#) to accessing post-rape care and justice due to pervasive discriminatory attitudes from medical providers and judicial actors.
- **Disability** | Women and girls with disabilities [face widespread discrimination, are disproportionately at risk](#) of GBV, and are more vulnerable to [public crises](#) and [disasters](#). They also struggle to access [justice](#), the [political process](#), [basic services](#), and [employment](#) due to [stigma](#) (many Haitian believe disability is a sign of supernatural punishment, and react with fear and unease); limitations on mobility, including as a consequence of poor public infrastructure; and lack of adequate support.
- **Displacement** | Displacement puts women and girls at added [risk](#) of sexual violence and exploitation, [child](#) trafficking, homelessness, family separation, and material deprivation. More than 113,000 people in Haiti are currently [displaced](#) – approximately 10 percent of the country’s total population – including a [disproportionate](#) number of women and girls. Displacement camps in Haiti have consistently suffered from a lack of adequate [security](#), [lighting](#), and [privacy](#) – all of which increase vulnerability to already [high levels of GBV](#) – as well as [inhumane conditions](#) and [challenges](#) to accessing food, potable water, adequate sanitation, healthcare, and other services. In the present crisis, systematic humanitarian assistance for the displaced in Port-au-Prince is scarce in spite of [growing need](#), and the largest formal displacement center recently [closed](#). Individuals claiming to own land and government officials have [violently evicted](#) displaced individuals from informal camps in the past and may [still](#) be doing so.

Q7

Political Participation

Politics is considered to be men's [domain](#) in Haiti and women are excluded through structural inequalities and targeted violence. By law, women are guaranteed equal participation in their government and Haiti's Constitution explicitly requires that 30 percent of positions in public office, political party membership, and on party ballots be held by women. Nevertheless, Haiti's last functioning parliament was less than [3 percent female](#), placing Haiti among the [worst](#) countries in the world for women's representation. [Incentives](#) to encourage compliance are weak and there are [no penalties](#) for non-compliance.

[Sexual violence and physical intimidation](#) are used by [gangs](#), political parties, and election workers to keep women from registering to vote, casting ballots, or running for office. Women voters, especially in rural areas, are sometimes forbidden by their husbands to participate in politics, and threatened with violence if they leave the house to cast a ballot. Such violence against women has been directly linked to [decreased voter turnout](#). Women candidates – who are already disadvantaged in accessing wealth and capital (Q4) – are also excluded from fundraising networks, maligned by party leaders, and propositioned for sexual favors in exchange for political support.

Women's exclusion from leadership can have adverse effects beyond inequality and the decreased likelihood of gender-sensitive policy approaches. For example, it is usually men who are put in charge of humanitarian relief distribution and the resulting dynamic of power and access can drive higher rates of sexual exploitation and abuse in the form of coerced transactional sex.

Marriage

A 1982 Presidential decree recognized a right to equality within marriage between women and men. However, discriminatory laws and practices remain in place. For example, men are traditionally considered the [decision-maker](#) and [head of the household](#) and the [law](#) gives husbands the [right](#) to determine where the family will live. Other examples of legal differentiation include the age of [marriage](#): 15 for girls, but 18 for boys; and penalties for adultery: wives can be sentenced to prison while husbands face only [fines](#). Further, though both women and men have the right to initiate a divorce, women face procedural disadvantages like the requirement that wives must formally request the partition of communal property within a prescribed period of time or [waive](#) their rights – an added judicial proceeding that may be effectively unavailable to poor women.

Property Ownership and Inheritance Rights

Very [few women](#) in Haiti own real property or land, [putting them](#) at a [significant disadvantage](#) with respect to financial security and economic empowerment. Only 27.4 percent of women – compared to 33.3 percent for men – [own](#) homes in Haiti; only 3 percent [own](#) an interest in land.

Inheritance laws and practices create further inequities that [increase](#) poverty for women and girls. Though by law, children have an equal right to inherit family property, in practice male children are sometimes favored over female children, who receive [smaller](#) inheritance shares. A married woman has the right to inherit property following the death of her husband, but that right does not apply to women in informal relationships known as "[plaçage](#)." Since only 12 percent of cohabitating couples are [legally](#) married in Haiti, most women have no property protection after a partner's death. A proposal to formally recognize [plaçage](#) unions has stalled in the legislature.

Q8

As discussed in Q4, women and girls, especially those experiencing poverty are more vulnerable, less resourced for resilience, and more exposed to all societal shocks. They likewise have fewer resources and face greater hurdles in overcoming structural obstacles, accessing assistance, or otherwise [recovering](#). The overwhelming failure to center the specific needs of women and girls and to include women – especially those from marginalized backgrounds – in decision-making and positions of authority drives unequal outcomes. It also, especially in the wake of humanitarian emergencies, further entrenches inequality. The following are salient examples.

- **Conflict** | Historically and in the [present moment](#), with [government-linked gang violence](#) effectively shutting down the country, sexual violence has [risen](#) during periods of conflict. Women and girls are attacked as a form of individual violence, but also as a deliberate effort to break communities. In the present moment, “armed gangs have [used](#) rape, including collective rapes, and other forms of sexual violence to instill fear, punish, subjugate, and inflict pain on local populations with the ultimate goal of expanding their areas of influence, throughout the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince.” As communities are stressed and access to resources restricted, women and girls are also increasingly pressured into transactional sex by armed actors and sometimes their own families looking for protection or desperately needed supplies. Because of the increased risk of violence for women during conflict, they are also disproportionately impeded from participating in public life, including earning a living or seeking critical assistance, thus compounding every other challenge. Further, increased violence tends to severely restrict resources or access thereto for survivors of GBV, including medical and psychological care, shelters, and judicial recourse (all of which are [already](#) in short supply in Haiti). In the current crisis there appears to be [almost no assistance](#) for women and girls displaced by the violence or those trapped in gang-controlled areas.
- **Natural Disasters** | Haiti is one of the world’s most vulnerable countries to natural disasters, with more than 96 percent of the population [exposed](#). Because women are socioeconomically marginalized, they are [impacted more](#) and experience greater difficulty recovering. Climate-related displacement specifically drives violence against women, including in the form of [land grabs](#). Displacement camps created in the wake of natural disasters like the [2010 earthquake](#) lacked adequate security measures, gender-sensitive services, and exposed women and girls to sexual exploitation and abuse. The same systematic failures characterize the [displacement camps](#) created in the wake of the 2021 earthquake and tropical storm. Further, failure to consider gender-specific vulnerabilities and needs in recovery planning for and responses to natural disasters, inadvertently [disadvantages](#) women and girls with respect to economic recovery and leadership.
- **Health Crises & Food Insecurity** | Women’s and girls’ disproportionate household burdens, including tasks like carrying water, cleaning, and caring for the sick, leave them more exposed to biological hazards like illnesses, as was observed with the UN-caused [cholera epidemic](#) in 2010. It also increases the emotional and socioeconomic impact of such diseases. Women’s and girls’ unequal status also means that they may receive less food if it becomes scarce or may be forced by families into transactional sex.

Q9

[International actors](#), including [foreign business corporations](#), wield overwhelming power in Haiti, often far [more](#) than the state itself (see also Q11). Such actors are required by human rights principles, including applicable [extraterritorial obligations](#), to respect Haitians as rights-holders and to implement [gender-sensitive approaches](#) and [protective measures](#) in their work so as to avoid exacerbating

structural inequities and triggering related harms. They have consistently [fallen short](#), and have instead [perpetrated abuses](#), caused [predictable harms](#) linked to power imbalances and structural injustices, and contributed to [increasing vulnerabilities](#) for women and girls. Salient examples include the below.

- Foreign military interventions billed as bringing security to Haiti have been responsible for [civilian massacres](#) through [indiscriminate killing](#) in poor neighborhoods.
- [Peacekeepers](#) and [aid workers](#) committed widespread sexual assaults and other GBV, wielding their positions of power and access to badly needed resources to solicit sex from – usually poor – women and girls driven to desperation. They [left behind](#) traumatized victims, fatherless children, and single mothers facing poverty and stigma.
- UN peacekeepers caused a [cholera epidemic](#), which [killed](#) 9,792 Haitians and infected over 820,000 in the wake of the 2010 earthquake.
- Foreign private actors purporting to boost Haiti’s development have extracted profits even as they neglect Haitian rights and entrench inequalities. They have [solicited and benefited from](#) interference by foreign governments and international financial institutions (IFIs) – for example, a decades-long [pressure campaign](#) led by the U.S. government to [reduce pro-poor spending in favor of free market capitalism](#). But they have not generally delivered on promised benefits for Haitians themselves and often play a deeply harmful role. For example, nearly [\\$200 million of post-earthquake development assistance](#) went to fund an industrial park that promised [65,000](#) new jobs. It delivered only [14,000](#) while [causing](#) mass displacement of peasant families and widespread human rights violations. Unions further [report](#) grossly inadequate wages, poor working conditions, and women being forced into sex to obtain and retain employment as “standard practice” in factories that are operated by or supply foreign corporations.
- Conditions attached to IFI loans that failed to consider Haitian rights protracted food insecurity [and associated vulnerabilities](#) that [affect](#) poor women and girls the most.
- Poor women are [disproportionately impacted](#) by the Haitian government’s policy of [expropriating peasant land](#) to [further](#) international business interests.

There has been effectively [no redress](#) for [victims](#) or [affected communities](#), who are thereby not only denied justice, but also made more vulnerable.

Haitians’ [current concerns](#) about a foreign military intervention closely relate to foreign actors’ past abuses of and disregard for their lives and rights.

Q11

The Haitian government [relies](#) almost exclusively on non-profit organizations to provide health and education services, and depends heavily on foreign donors and financial institutions to fund social safety net programs. This dependence on foreign aid is the [predictable – and in some ways intended – consequence](#) of [decades of foreign interference](#) that weakened the Haitian state and restricted its social spending towards objectives like SDGs, oftentimes through a [concerted push](#) against pro-poor policies in favor of foreign business interests. Foreign partners leverage significant [influence](#) over which social programs will be funded and prioritized, and operate without accountability to the Haitian people and institutions they purport to benefit. Oftentimes, this has meant that policies intended to benefit the poor [actually do the opposite](#). The resulting power imbalance between the weakened state and powerful international actors [inhibits](#) the Haitian government’s ability to address poverty or to push back against

harmful foreign policies, and ultimately perpetuates the cycle of dependence and exploitation. Assistance for and spending on social programs peaked in the wake of the 2010 earthquake, then dissipated.

Today, social programs operating in Haiti [are](#) fragmented, underfunded, poorly targeted, and undermined by weak governance. Existing interventions have not appreciably reduced [poverty](#), have limited [reach](#), and – where linked to formal employment – cannot reach the disproportionate number of women and girls in the informal economy at all. In June 2020, the Council of Ministers adopted a promising [National Policy](#) for Social Protection and Promotion, which includes gender-based [targets](#), and prioritizes support for rural households, the elderly, persons with disabilities, and children under five. But the policy has yet to be [implemented](#), and funders [acknowledge](#) concerns about the government’s capacity to do so.

In the past, Haiti has successfully [implemented programs](#) that [advanced the rights of women](#) and tackled poverty, demonstrating that an accountable democratic government invested in promoting human rights is capable of addressing the challenges described in this submission. Between 2000 and 2004, for example, the government [supported](#) women’s groups that provide material and emotional support to rape survivors, opened 20,000 literacy centers, and expanded health care access for women and girls. A record number of women were [elected](#) to public office and appointed to serve in high ranking positions, including as Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Minister of Finance. Those gains have been largely [eroded](#) by foreign interference and [domestic power struggles](#) linked to class.

Q12

[Nègès Mawon](#) is a feminist political organization working to confront and dismantle patriarchal structures that impede women’s and girls’ full enjoyment of their rights in Haiti. It provides critical services, advocates for gender justice, educates and strengthens communities and individuals in their efforts to do the same, and offers corresponding thought leadership. Almost all projects also integrate programming to empower women and girls and create income-generating activities. *Nègès Mawon* is further committed to intersectional approaches that support marginalized groups, including formerly incarcerated women and sex workers. Core programming includes:

- Multidimensional assistance program to women and girls surviving GBV, including professional staff providing medical, psychological, legal, and sometimes economic assistance. This is a program being expanded to increase access to gang-controlled areas.
- Assistance for vulnerable women to access health care, including reliable information and resources for sexual and reproductive care along with access to safe abortion.
- Education programs about sexual and reproductive health, human rights and citizenship, GBV, and other topics critical to gender and social justice, offered to men, women, and children (with a specialized curriculum for adolescents to enable good choices about personal development and safety).
- Biannual trilingual feminist anthology available worldwide and an annual feminist festival that contribute to Haitian feminist thought, the transmission and mobilization of knowledge, and collaboration, while creating opportunities and spaces for advocacy.

[HWC](#) brings together and encourages civic engagement by women-led organizations based in Haiti that provide direct services and are accountable to specific constituents in various departments around the country. Partner organizations tackle education, civic engagement, safe spaces for girls, and advocacy. HWC offers its partners funding and collaboration that build organizational strength, promote innovation, reclaim narratives, and advance expertise as a means of promoting women’s empowerment.

The BAI's [Rape Accountability and Prevention Project](#) (RAPP) involves (i) direct, no-cost legal representation to secure justice for individual survivors, establish precedents for prosecuting GBV in Haitian courts, and strengthen associated justice sector mechanisms; (ii) referrals for medical services; (iii) supporting capacity-building for grassroots women's groups to enhance local abilities to confront GBV and educate communities on rights enforcement; and (iv) public advocacy to fuel Haiti's women's movement and generate support for gender justice within Haitian society. Through RAPP and complementary community education and outreach, as well as IJDH-supported advocacy through international human rights mechanisms, BAI works to advance gender equality and reduce GBV and other gendered risks that can exclude women and girls from education, employment, dignified standards of living, and equal participation in all aspects of domestic and public life.

Q15

Haiti has a [vibrant](#) women's movement that has successfully [mobilized and advocated](#) for legislative action and other interventions to advance the rights of women, girls, and all Haitians. Examples include amending the Constitution to include the gender quota for public office, the 2005 decree that finally criminalized rape, and the 2014 [Law on Paternity, Maternity, and Filiation](#) (enshrining equal parenting rights and obligations). The movement successfully lobbied for the creation of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Women's Rights, which initially served as an effective platform for strengthening and amplifying advocacy efforts for structural reform and services alike, but has been marginalized through [lack of funding and political will](#). Grassroots women organizers have also [often played crucial](#) roles in organizing effective disaster and crisis responses, [advocating](#) for policies like better displacement camp protections and special justice sector measures to confront GBV, and providing critical services.

The movement's ability to participate in decision-making was [greatly impeded](#) after the 2010 earthquake, partly through tragedy – key leaders were killed – but mostly through the actions of foreign actors and government failures. The international community leveraged extensive resources for earthquake recovery, but most money [stayed](#) with foreign organizations, which generally funded local entities only to execute programs. The result was the [near-decimation](#) of the women's movement's capacity for advocacy and policy change. Women's organizations could get funding for the important work of providing services to women and girls, but not for the – equally important – work of confronting the underlying structural inequalities through legal, policy, and cultural change. The power imbalance created through the funding dynamic (see also Q11) and international preference for certain kinds of projects has persisted. Further, the international community played a significant role in bringing to power a series of governments associated with the *Pati Ayisyen Tèt Kale* (PHTK), which exhibited [sexism](#) and deprioritized efforts aimed at empowering women and the poor. PHTK-linked regimes have been connected to [civilian massacres](#) targeting popular neighborhoods, [gross corruption](#), and a [general degradation](#) of rights and services.

There is also a sense among many women's groups in Haiti that international partners often fund initiatives that do not match what Haitians identify as priorities: for example, that UN Women has ignored their urging to prioritize tackling political violence (see Q7) as the path to improve women's political participation and instead focuses on technical training they consider ineffective. An especially pernicious pattern is the frequent request for consultation by international actors without follow-through on incorporating local feedback into the final articulation of priorities, program design, and implementation. Such practices waste the already scarce resources and energy of Haitian organizers, break down trust, and eliminate the benefits of collaboration and dialogue. We also observe consistent failures to prioritize and enable the participation of groups facing greater structural barriers to engagement (including language, literacy, and internet access) and more generally to dedicate adequate resources to surmounting those and other factors impeding women's participation (like lack of time and money).

Recommendations (Qs19-21)

1. Enact and fully implement legislation and accompanying policies and programs to vindicate the rights of women and girls recognized by Haiti's Constitution and human rights treaty obligations. Include clear and enforced penalties for violations. Any such legislation must be enacted in a manner consistent with Haiti's Constitution and the rule of law. Legislation and policies should be regularly reviewed and where necessary updated based on new data (see Recommendation 12) and emerging best practices.
2. Consistent with SDG5 (gender equality), actively support and promote the meaningful inclusion of women from marginalized backgrounds – alongside consideration of their specific needs – in leadership, planning, and delivery of services. This requires taking into account vulnerabilities and limitations through deliberate outreach, active accommodation, and thoughtful support. As a baseline, inclusion requires the use of modes and methods that enable participation in Haitian Creole, regardless of literacy. The mere act of consultation is insufficient; it is necessary to adopt specific measures that ensure that input is reflected in program design, implementation, and adjustment.
3. Mainstream gender considerations in all legislation, policy-making, and administration, especially when related to rights and considerations reflected in SDGs, by assessing, planning for, and treating as a priority the distinct needs of women and girls, taking into account any intersecting vulnerabilities. This includes gender-sensitive implementation, which may necessitate specialized training and dedicated mechanisms or staffing. Prevention of and effective responses to GBV must be mandatory considerations.
4. Ensure sustained funding and provide other measures of support to sustain policies and programs related to women and girls, including with respect to economic empowerment. Recognize and maintain related efforts as critical priorities for the government of Haiti and its partners.
5. Across all government, development, peacebuilding, and humanitarian work, prioritize the equal participation of women in leadership and decision-making roles. To that end, implement laws and policies, including community education, to reduce political violence directed at women seeking to participate in public spaces.
6. Expressly confront harmful stereotypes directed against women and girls – especially those with intersecting marginalizing identities – through mandatory curriculum for schools, public information campaigns, and community education, especially in rural areas. Content should focus on the positive aspects associated with women's equality – such as recognition of their individual capacities and their critical contributions to community development, as well as the negative harms of gender discrimination to individuals and communities.
7. Support and sustain civil society capacity for advocacy and policy work targeting structural inequalities alongside other programmatic efforts to support women and girls.
8. Expand and strengthen accountability mechanisms available to women and girls. Improve Haiti's judicial system's capacity to enforce and protect rights in a gender-sensitive and inclusive manner, including through the means recommended above and by creating and maintaining specialized units; providing corresponding training; monitoring and sanctioning non-compliance; and increasing the number of women in leadership roles. Ratify the Optional Protocol to CEDAW allowing for individual complaints.
9. [Confront](#) all forms of GBV directed at women and girls, including sexual harassment in education and employment and political violence, through the means recommended above. Implement

sustainably funded services for survivors (including shelters, medical and psychological care, and legal support).

10. Expand social services and government programs to vindicate the basic socio-economic rights of women and girls, especially to freedom from extreme poverty (SDG1) and other critical needs recognized as SDGs through the means recommended above and subject to the following:

- a. Across all measures
 - i. Treat poor and marginalized individuals as dignified rights-holders and not passive recipients of charity;
 - ii. Reduce, subsidize, and eliminate fees and travel burdens associated with accessing services;
 - iii. Improve security in public spaces necessary for accessing services;
 - iv. Consistently with SDG16, ensure that all government institutions are equally accessible and offer equitable treatment to women and girls, taking special account of intersecting marginalizing identities;
 - v. Crack down on harassment, intimidation, and extortion for sexual or other favors in connection with the provision of services;
 - vi. Reduce barriers to services, including by ensuring access in Haitian Creole and accommodating any literacy challenges;
 - vii. Where possible, confront structural drivers of vulnerabilities and inequality in addition to providing basic safety nets.
- b. With respect to access to adequate food (SDG2): protect and enhance access to local food production, require local sourcing in the provision of international assistance, and protect against land-grabs; implement subsidies and food distribution for pregnant women and children, including outside schools and urban centers which may not be accessible to the rural poor.
- c. With respect to health (SDG3): increase points of accessing medical care, especially in rural areas; expand in particular services related to sexual and reproductive health; legalize and enable free access to abortion care; make contraceptives readily available and invest in public campaigns to popularize their use; expand psycho-social services for survivors of GBV, especially for young girls.
- d. With respect to education (SDG4): enact and enforce measures requiring girls' attendance in school; remove fees for public education; educate families and communities regarding the value of girls' education and the harms of alternative occupations; implement and enforce laws and policies prohibiting sexual harassment and exploitation of girls in connection with their education.
- e. With respect to clean water and sanitation (SDG6): ensure long-term access to clean water and safeguard against the spread of waterborne diseases like cholera by improving water, sanitation and hygiene systems around Haiti. The UN in particular [owes](#) swift and comprehensive action in this regard as recompense for introducing cholera to Haiti.

- f. With respect to accessing livelihoods (SDG8): enact and sustainably fund programs to improve women's skills and access to credit, finance, and other business inputs; protect women's land-ownership and offer insurance or other disaster support for small women business owners; implement and enforce incentives for businesses to hire more women and to advance them to management positions.
 - g. With respect to climate security (SDGS7&13): actively solicit and enable [women's leadership and participation](#) in planning and implementing measures related to climate challenges and opportunities, especially growth areas like green jobs and clean energy.
11. Implement and enforce the 2014 Law on Paternity, Maternity, and Filiation and corresponding government programs to help mothers establish paternity and efficiently enforce child support obligations, including from foreign national fathers associated with international organizations or institutions like the UN. Recourse must be simple and accessible for the mothers and children. Invest in related education about the parental obligations of fathers and the rights of children to full support from all parents.
 12. Regularly collect and publicly disseminate gender-disaggregated data across all key metrics, especially those related to topics elevated as SDGs; direct special attention to GBV, including political violence targeting women and girls. Ensure that effective and compatible methodologies are used to enable aggregation and analysis. To the extent possible, further disaggregate data based on intersecting identities that can drive further marginalization.
 13. International partners must hold themselves accountable to the people of Haiti and commit to a solidarity model of engagement that prioritizes active solicitation and incorporation of Haitian perspectives, inputs, and preferred solutions subject to the inclusion and other considerations put forward in these Recommendations. This requires adherence to a rights-based approach in the delivery of services, including special consideration to gender-specific vulnerabilities like GBV and transactional sex, which has too often characterized foreign assistance to Haiti. This equally means accountability in the event of harms, regardless of intent, including transparent, simple, and accessible means for making affected individuals and communities whole. Military interventions should only be sent pursuant to a request from a legitimate Haitian government, and must include: (i) an acknowledgement that any sexual exploitation or abuse by force members is necessarily done outside official duties – and therefore not subject to any immunity protections; (ii) an independent, credible, and accessible structure for receiving complaints of sexual exploitation or abuse by force members; and (iii) a mechanism for the enforcement of child support obligations for the duration of childhood that is accessible to the mothers of any children fathered by force members.